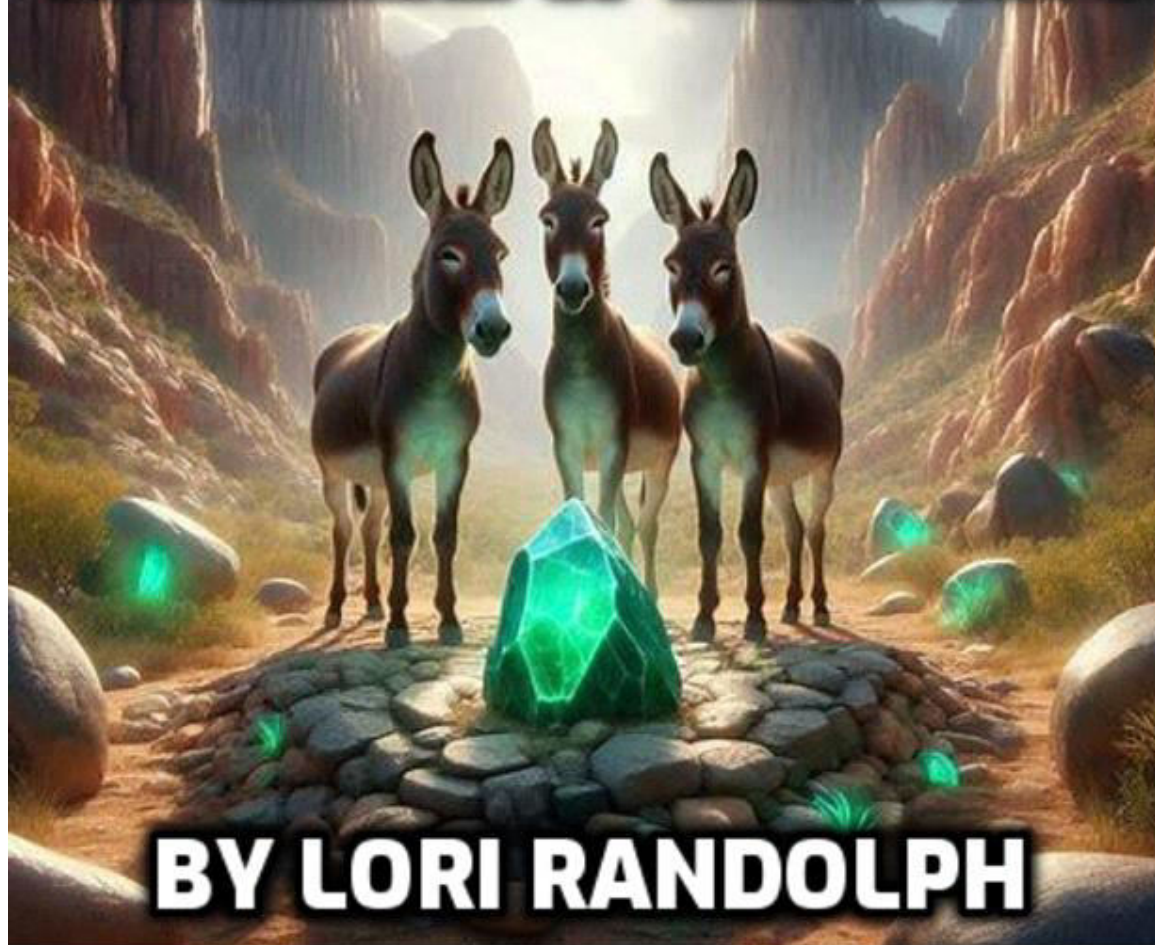


**THE 3 DONKEY'S AND THE COYOTE  
THE LEGEND OF GAURDIAN'S**



**BY LORI RANDOLPH**

## The Legend of the Guardian's Heart

Once upon a time in Oatman, Arizona, lived three donkeys named Durango, Dugger, and Digger, along with Snarly Snake and Clemento Coyote. You'll meet them later in the story. Durango was the leader of the three and kept the others in line when they misbehaved, goofed off, or got scared. Dugger was the silliest of the bunch, always playing practical jokes and running into things. Digger was the slowpoke of the group, but whenever he saw a snake, he'd run as fast as he could because he was afraid.

They work for man named Buford Bunford  
them out giving rides to tourist so they wo  
seeing the trails in arizona in the desert.

Durango liked giving rides to tourist cause  
the view from the trails in the great outdoo

Dugger did not.

he wanted to play instead of of work his d  
be town donkey in Az.

Digger didn't mind his job as long he didnt  
Snake or Coyote he scared of them.

Lets meet bad ones Snarly and Clemento.

Clemento and Snarly's plan is all set to use the donkeys. Let's see what happens.

Durango: Dugger, no practical jokes today. If you do, there will be no carrots for a month.

Dugger: I understand, I'll be on my best behavior.

Durango: Good!

Digger: I hope there are no rattlesnakes or coyotes on the trail.

Durango: I doubt any are on these trails. You have my promise, Digger.

The donkeys are now saddling up.

Just as Clemento prepared to pounce, a high-pitched, feisty bark echoed through the canyon. From behind a nearby tumbleweed, a tiny but fearless Chihuahua named Chico bounded into the middle of the trail, wearing a miniature sheriff's star on his collar.

Chico: Hold it right there, you desert rascals! This trail is for tourists and hard-working donkeys only!

Clemento: (Laughing) A tiny dog? You've got to be joking. Snarly, look at this little snack.

Snarly: He'ss hardly a mouthful, boss. Let me sscarre him off.

Chico: I may be small, but I've got friends in high places! NOW, BOYS!

Suddenly, a dozen Jackrabbits popped out from their burrows, kicking up a massive cloud of blinding desert dust with their powerful back legs.

Dugger: Wow! It's a dust storm!

Durango: No, it's a distraction! Digger, Dugger—follow the sound of Chico's bark! Run!

Digger: (Running faster than he ever has) I'm moving! I'm moving!

Clemento: (Coughing in the dust) I can't see! Where did they go?

Snarly: My eyess! They're full of ssand!

By the time the dust settled, the three donkeys and their new hero, Chico, were halfway down the mountain, leaving the two bullies squinting and sneezing behind them.

Durango: Thanks for the save, Chico. What can we do to repay you?

Chico: Just keep those trails safe, amigos. And maybe share a carrot or two?

Should the group head back to Buford to tell him about the rescue, or should they continue the tour with Chico as their new scout?

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The trail ahead opened up into a breathtaking valley of golden sand and towering rock arches. With Chico leading the way, the three donkeys felt braver than ever before.

Chico: Follow me, amigos! I know a secret path that leads to the Crystal Spring. The tourists love the sparkling water, and there are no bullies allowed!

Dugger: Crystal Spring? Does it have crystal carrots too?

Durango: Focus, Dugger! But Chico is right; a water break is exactly what the tourists need after that dusty escape.

Digger: (Looking back nervously) Are you sure the "bully boss" and his snake aren't following us?

Chico: Don't you worry, Digger. Those two are still back there trying to wash the dust out of their ears!

As they reached the hidden spring, the water shimmered like diamonds under the Arizona sun. The tourists cheered, snapping photos of the beautiful oasis. Even Dugger was so impressed he forgot to play a joke for a whole five minutes.

Durango: You know, boys, with a scout like Chico, we might just become the best trail guides in the whole state!

Suddenly, Chico stopped and sniffed the air, his tiny ears twitching. "Wait... do you hear that? It sounds like someone is calling for help from the Great Red Arch!"

Should the team rush to the rescue, or should they set up camp at the spring first to gather their strength?

The sun began to dip behind the jagged peaks, painting the Arizona sky in streaks of fiery orange and deep purple. Durango signaled for the group to halt near the shimmering Crystal Spring.

Durango: "Alright team, we've had enough excitement for one day. We set up camp here. Dugger, stop trying to see if the rocks are edible and help me clear some space."

Dugger: "I wasn't eating them! I was... inspecting them for quality. But okay, boss!"

Digger: (Sighing with relief) "Finally! My legs feel like jelly. And the best part? No snakes in sight."

Chico: "I'll take the first watch, amigos. My ears are sharp, and nothing gets past a Chihuahua on a mission!"

As the tourists settled in and the donkeys began to munch on some well-earned hay, the desert grew quiet. The only sound was the gentle bubbling of the spring. However, just as Digger was about to drift off into a deep sleep, he noticed a strange, glowing light reflecting off the canyon wall across the water.

Digger: "Uh, Durango? Is it just me, or is that cave over there... sparkling?"

Chico: (Sniffing the air) "That's not just light. That's the scent of old silver! We might have stumbled onto a lost mine."

The moon rose high over the canyon, casting long, silvery shadows as the team approached the mysterious cave. The glow wasn't from a fire, but from veins of silver embedded deep in the rock, catching the moonlight.

Chico: "Stay close, everyone. These old mines can be tricky, but I've got a nose for adventure!"

Dugger: "Wait, if this is a silver mine, does that mean we're rich? Can I buy a mountain made of carrots?"

Durango: "Keep your head in the game, Dugger. Look at these markings on the wall—they aren't from miners."

Digger pointed a shaky hoof toward a series of ancient drawings. They depicted three donkeys and a small dog standing against a great shadow.

Digger: "Is it just me, or does that donkey in the middle have your exact ears, Durango?"

Chico: (Growling softly) "Hush! Someone—or something—is already in here. I hear a shovel hitting the ground."

Deep in the tunnels, a familiar, scratchy voice echoed: "Just a little further, Snarly! Once we find the Great Emerald, we won't need to bully anyone ever again!"

Durango whispered to the group, "It's Clemento and Snarly! They must have found a secret entrance."

"Quiet as a mouse," Chico whispered, his tiny paws barely making a sound on the cavern floor.

Durango signaled for everyone to step only on the sandy patches, avoiding the loose gravel that would crunch and give them away. They crept along the high ledge of the tunnel, looking down into a large chamber where Clemento was frantically digging and Snarly was holding a flickering lantern.

Clemento: "Faster, Snarly! Hold that light steady! The map says the Great Emerald is buried right under the 'Crying Stone'!"

Snarly: "I'm trying, bosss! But my tail is starting to cramp..."

The donkeys held their breath. Dugger almost let out a sneeze when a bit of cave dust tickled his nose, but Digger quickly clamped a hoof over his mouth. They successfully bypassed the bullies and rounded a corner into a hidden grotto.

There, sitting atop a natural stone pedestal, sat the Great Emerald. It didn't just glow; it pulsed with a soft, green light that seemed to make the very air feel warm and safe.

Dugger: (Whispering) "It's beautiful... it looks like a giant, glowing head of lettuce."

Chico: "Wait! Don't touch it yet. Look at the floor around the pedestal."

The floor was covered in a delicate layer of balanced pebbles. One wrong step would knock them over and trigger a loud alarm of clattering stones.



### Step 1: The Tactical Plan

Chico realizes that even the "soft-stepping" donkeys are too heavy for the pebble floor. He decides to use his light weight and agility to reach the pedestal while the others stay back.

### Step 2: The Delicate Move

Chico carefully leaps from one solid rock to another, bypassing the pebbles entirely. He reaches the top of the pedestal and gently nudges the Great Emerald into a small burlap sack he brought from Buford's camp. To keep the weight balanced so the pedestal doesn't trigger a trap, he quickly replaces the emerald with Dugger's shiny, green-wrapped emergency snack bar.

### Step 3: The Narrow Escape

Just as Chico hops back to safety, Clemento and Snarly burst into the grotto, having heard the faint "click" of the snack bar hitting the stone.

Clemento: "Aha! There it is! The green glow! We're rich, Snarly!"

Snarly: "Wait, bosss... why does the Great Emerald smell like... sour apple and oats?"

Answer:

The team successfully sneaks out of the cave through a small side tunnel while the bullies are busy trying to "peel" their treasure. They emerge back at the Crystal Spring just as the first light of dawn hits the valley.

As Chico lifts the emerald, a deep, low rumbling begins to shake the cavern walls. Small pebbles start to dance on the floor, and dust rains down from the ceiling. The cave is starting to crumble!

Chico: "The emerald is the heart of the cave! Without it, the whole place is coming down!"

Durango: "Put it back, Chico! The treasure isn't worth losing our hides!"

Chico quickly slides the Great Emerald back onto the pedestal. Instantly, the shaking stops. The green pulse of the stone grows brighter, and a warm wave of energy sweeps through the grotto, sealing the cracks in the walls as if by magic.

Digger: "Whew! That was a close one. I like my caves in one piece, thank you very much."

Dugger: "Wait, if we can't take the 'Giant Lettuce' with us, how do we show Buford we found it?"

Chico: "We don't need the stone, amigos. Look at your hooves!"

The donkeys look down and see that their hooves are now glowing with a faint, shimmering green stardust from the cave floor. It's proof of where they've been!

Durango: "Let's get out of here before Clemento and Snarly figure out why the earth moved. We've got a story to tell!"

As they exit the cave, they see the bullies running in the opposite direction, terrified by the "earthquake." The team returns to Buford's camp just as the sun rises, their glowing hooves leaving a trail of light in the sand.

Buford: "Well, look at you three! You look like you've been walking on stars! What in the world happened out there?"

Should the donkeys tell Buford the whole truth about the secret cave, or keep it as a special secret between them and Chico?

Buford listens intently, his eyes widening as the donkeys and Chico explain the glowing cave and the terrifying rumbling. When they finish, he lets out a long, slow whistle and kneels down to look at the shimmering green dust on their hooves.

Buford: "Well now, you boys have found the Guardian's Heart. I'd heard legends from the old-timers, but I never truly believed 'em until now."

Durango: "But Buford, why did the whole cave start to crumble when Chico lifted it?"

Buford: "That's because that emerald isn't just a gem, Durango. It's the anchor for this entire canyon. The legends say it holds the rock walls together and keeps the Crystal Spring flowing. If you'd taken it out of that grotto, the spring would've dried up, and the trails we love would've collapsed into the desert floor."

Digger: "So... we did the right thing putting it back?"

Buford: "You did more than that. You saved the Arizona desert. That emerald belongs to the mountain, not to a museum or a pocket. It's meant to be seen by those brave enough to find it, but never owned by anyone."

Dugger: "Does that mean we don't get a reward? Not even one extra carrot?"

Buford: (Laughing) "Tell you what. Since you protected the mountain and outsmarted those bullies, I'm declaring today Official Donkey Rest Day. All the carrots you can eat, and a long nap in the shade!"

Just then, Clemento and Snarly are seen in the distance, covered in soot and looking very grumbly as they retreat toward the prickly cactus patches.

Should we end the story with a big celebration at the ranch, or should Chico notice a new mystery appearing on the horizon?

Buford nods solemnly, looking out toward the Red Arch as the morning sun hits the canyon floor.

Buford: "My Great-Grandfather had a Native American friend who helped him understand these lands long ago. He told him that the Heart was placed there by his ancestors to keep the spirit of the mountain alive. They made sure it was hidden deep enough so that nobody should ever see it or find it ever again."

Durango: "But we found it, Buford. Does that mean the secret is out?"



Buford: "Not quite, son. The mountain only shows its heart to those with a good spirit. But to make sure it stays safe forever, we're going to do what should have been done ages ago. We're going to block the entrance to that secret tunnel with those boulders the earthquake shook loose."

Chico: "I'll help! I can spot the perfect rocks to wedge into the gaps!"

Would you like to start a brand new adventure with the donkeys, or perhaps create a special ending for what happens to Snarly and Clemento?

Working together, the donkeys use their strength to push heavy stones in front of the hidden grotto, while Chico directs them and Buford secures the path with desert brush. When they are finished, the entrance is completely invisible. The Great Emerald is finally tucked away in total darkness, where its magic can keep the canyon strong without being disturbed by bullies or treasure hunters.

Buford: "It's done. It'll be our little secret—a part of the desert's soul that'll stay safe and sound for a thousand more years."

As they head back to the ranch for their carrot feast, Dugger looks back one last time and smiles, knowing that even though they didn't bring the treasure home, they brought back something much better: a story that would never be forgotten.

THE END.